

# Hidden Heritage

## AFRO-AMERICAN ART

1800–1950



March 8 - May 3, 1987

**THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART**  
Monroe Street at Scottwood Avenue  
Toledo, Ohio

**Organized by**  
**the Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, Washington**  
**and The Art Museum Association of America**

**Sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.**

Afro-Americans

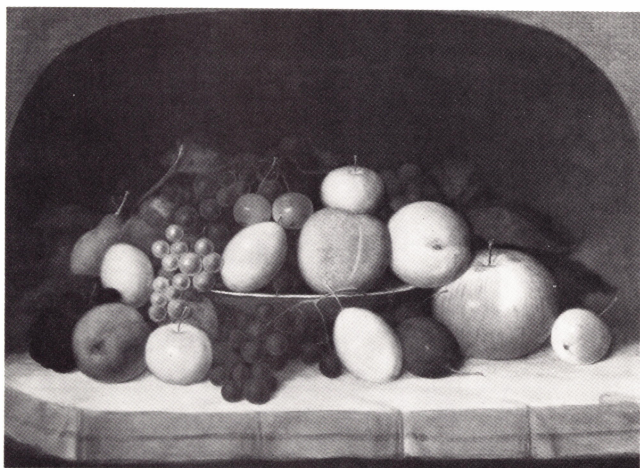
have been a vital force in American art for nearly three-hundred years, from eighteenth-century self-taught portraitists to twentieth-century abstractionists. *Hidden Heritage: Afro-American Art, 1800-1950* demonstrates the early and continuing role of Afro-American artists in the major movements defining the development of painting and sculpture in America.



Joshua Johnston, *Mother and Daughter*. 1805. Oil on canvas,  $30\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$  in. Collection: Dr. and Mrs. William H. Cosby, Jr., Greenfield, Massachusetts. Photo: David Stansbury.

The achievements of the Baltimore portraitist Joshua Johnston illustrate the degree to which a Black artist could succeed during the early nineteenth century. He is generally considered to be an early naive painter, but his works reveal considerable skill and sophistication, including an understanding of contemporary portrait formulae and popular styles of Federalist portraiture. Johnston's artistic success was reflected in his commercial success. Catering to Baltimore's upper class, he was able to support a family and own property—uncommon accomplishments for Blacks in America before the Civil War.

Robert Stuart Duncanson was internationally recognized as a Romantic landscapist, but he also painted portraits of prominent patrons, including some well-known abolitionists and wealthy midwestern socialites. With the assistance of his patron Nicholas Longworth and the Anti-Slavery League, Duncanson was able to make several trips to England, France, Italy, and Scotland. By 1861 his work rivaled that of European historical painters. Contemporary critics compared his style to members of the Hudson River School.



Robert S. Duncanson, *Fruit Still Life*. 1849. Oil on canvas,  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 19$  in. Collection: Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Museum Purchase, 1968. Photo: © Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Edward M. Bannister was an important exponent of the Barbizon School in America. His painting *Under the Oaks* (now lost) won a first-place bronze medal and certificate of award at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 and signaled official recognition of American landscape painting's new direction and foretold its dominance among American artists and patrons until the 1890s. The award represented something more. It represented a cultural landmark in American history because the Exposition officials did not know Bannister was Black and because, when his identity was discovered, it was decided among the Centennial officials that the award would remain.



Edward M. Bannister, *Oak Trees*. 1870. Oil on Canvas,  $34\frac{1}{8} \times 60\frac{5}{8}$  in. Collection: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., transfer from the Museum of African Art. Photo: Margaret Harmon.





Mary Edmonia Lewis, *The Arrowmaker and Daughter*. ca. 1872. Marble, 24×13 in. Collection: Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama. Photo: Chris Eden.

Edmonia Lewis was the first Afro-American artist to reach a broad, popular audience with themes that related to her racial origins—Afro-American from her father and Chippewa Indian from her mother. Using subjects from the Bible, classical mythology, her own heritage, and abolitionist writings, she created works dealing with the plight of the American Indian, the African slave, and women. Her portrait busts immortalized individual abolitionists and prominent patrons. Lewis's work is perhaps the earliest example of American sculpture to comment directly on the social and political position of Blacks in the United States.

The late nineteenth century produced a number of successful Afro-American artists who formed a transition from the world of Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the surge of creativity stimulated by the New Deal programs in the 1930s and early 1940s. One of these artists was Henry O. Tanner.

Tanner's career spanned the years in which American artistic tastes successively embraced French Academicism and Impressionism and, after 1900, numerous manifestations of modernism. He enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1880, studying for two years with the American Realist Thomas Eakins. Primarily known as a painter of genre scenes and religious themes, Tanner created works distinguished by dramatic light effects. By using thin glazes he was able to achieve unusual depth and luminosity in his paintings, capturing the vibrancy of the light he found on frequent trips to northern Africa and the Holy Land.





Henry O. Tanner, *The Disciples on the Sea*. ca. 1910. Oil on canvas,  $21\frac{5}{8} \times 26\frac{1}{2}$  in. Collection: The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio. Gift of Frank W. Gunsaulus.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, educational opportunities for aspiring Black artists began to increase, despite continuing racial oppression. Hale Woodruff, an artist known for murals on historical themes executed in several colleges throughout the South, was responsible for developing the art department at Atlanta University and then went on to establish the University's Annual Art Exhibition,



Hale Woodruff, *The Card Players*. 1930. Oil on canvas,  $22 \times 28$  in. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. John H. Hewitt, New York, New York. Photo: Chris Eden.

which provided regular exposure for hundreds of Afro-American artists. From 1927 to 1933 the Harmon Foundation Exhibitions served as an important vehicle for the support of young Black artists. After the crash of 1929, as most of the financial support for the arts dried up, the Harmon Foundation and the government's Work Projects Administration became the only programs available to assist Afro-American artists.

By 1943 James Porter, artist and historian, had published his book *Modern Negro Art*, which for many years formed the basis for modern scholarship in Black art—African, Afro-American, and Afro-Brazilian. In fact, the writings of Porter, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Alain Locke were valued deeply by many artists like Sargent Johnson and Aaron Douglas, who began to seek out African sources for their paintings and sculpture in response to the new view of their roles as Afro-American artists.



Archibald Motley, Jr., *Black Belt*. 1934. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 39 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. Collection: Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia. Photo: Chris Eden.

Artists like Archibald Motley and Palmer Hayden, on the other hand, remained closer to home. Following the example set by Horace Pippin, their work was inspired by Afro-American daily life, folklore, humor, religion, and history. These artists developed a new kind of American genre style which, in an interestingly ethnic manner, reflects the earlier genre works of Bingham and Mount.

After 1930, some American artists turned to non-Western art—African, Mexican, and Asian—as their new sources for artistic expression. Other artists looked to Europe, to the achievements of such artists as Picasso, Braque, Ernst, and Matisse, who had created new visual concepts in part through their use of African

Elizabeth Catlett, *Pensive*. 1946.  
Bronze,  $16\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  in.  
Lent by the artist, Cuernavaca,  
Mexico. Photo: Chris Eden.



art, as well as jazz, America's new music. Still other artists, including Elizabeth Catlett and Jacob Lawrence, developed a personal style that expressed a political point of view. Norman Lewis executed works that eliminated all figural references like his contemporaries Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko.

From Joshua Johnston, Henry O. Tanner, and Jacob Lawrence to the young artists of today, Blacks have worked in every aspect of the visual arts in America—always in the face of great difficulties but often with great success. For many years the record of this important body of work was ignored. It is hoped that the present exhibition will help to remedy this oversight.



Jacob Lawrence, *Street Scene*. 1937. Gouache on paper,  $8\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{3}{4}$  in. Courtesy: Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York, New York. Photo: Chris Eden.



# THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

## presents Timeframes A CELEBRATION OF AFRO-AMERICAN ARTS in conjunction with the exhibition

**LECTURE** *Sunday, March 8 at 3:00 p.m., Little Theater*

**\*AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION**

by David Driskell, Professor of Art, University of Maryland

**FILM** *Sunday, March 15, at 2:00 p.m., Little Theater*

**\*TWO CENTURIES OF BLACK AMERICAN ART**

**PERFORMANCE** *Sunday, March 22, at 3:00 p.m., Peristyle*

ISHANGI FAMILY DANCERS

Admission Adults \$4.00, Children \$2.00

**PERFORMANCE** *Wednesday, March 25, at 8:00 p.m., Peristyle*

THE BILLY TAYLOR TRIO

Admission \$8.00

**FILM** *Sunday, March 29, at 2:00 p.m., Little Theater*

**\*THE ANGEL THAT STANDS BY ME**

**FILM** *Sunday, April 5, at 2:00 p.m., Little Theater*

**\*BLACK SHADOWS ON A SILVER SCREEN**

### Other Events

**\*COMMUNITY OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION**

*Sunday, March 8, from 4:00-5:30 p.m.*

Monroe Street Lobby

**\*SUNDAY PUBLIC TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION**

*Every Sunday from March 8 to May 3*

**CONCERT** *Sunday, March 8, at 2:00 p.m., Great Gallery*

**\*THE CLARENCE SMITH COMMUNITY CHORUS**

**PERFORMANCE** *Thursday, March 19, a.m., Peristyle*

ISHANGI FAMILY DANCERS

Two performances for school groups, Admission \$2.00

**PERFORMANCE** *Friday, March 20, a.m., Peristyle*

ISHANGI FAMILY DANCERS

Two performances for school groups, Admission \$2.00

**CONCERT** *Sunday, May 3, at 4:00 p.m., Peristyle*

LEONTYNE PRICE IN CONCERT

Admission from \$8.00-\$22.00

**WORKSHOP** *Saturday, February 28*

**\*Teacher Workshops BING DAVIS**

Co-sponsored by the Museum and Arts Unlimited

**WORKSHOP** *Saturday, March 21*

Teacher Workshop ISHANGI FAMILY DANCERS

Admission \$10.00

**\*NO ADMISSION CHARGE**

For additional information about this exhibition and programs, please call the Museum at (419) 255-8000. After December 1, 1986, information about Kidframes, family and youth programs, will be available from the Museum Education Department, ext. 363.

### MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday to Saturday 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Sunday 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Closed Monday and major holidays. The Museum Cafe is open

Tuesday-Saturday 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

The national tour of this exhibition is sponsored by Phillip Morris Companies, Inc. The Toledo Museum of Art received additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ohio Arts Council.

Community programs for *Hidden Heritage: Afro-American Art 1800-1950* are sponsored by TRUSTCORP, INC.